



SE News
HD In the world of business, it's all about going for the green
BY Chris Lackner
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Rising public concern over the environment could push the corporate and scientific communities to find innovative solutions to climate change, business and technology experts say.

While government regulation is often seen as a necessary catalyst for battling climate change, public opinion can alter the corporate world's behaviour.

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If the market demands "green-friendly" products, services and energy sources, companies will be financially motivated to deliver, said Robert Klassen, an environmental management expert at the University of Western Ontario's Richard Ivey School of Business.

"There is a huge opportunity for big business," he said.

"The environment has definitely been pushed to the forefront and senior managers who drive a lot of innovation projects and sort through which projects to fund, are examining how they are going to leverage it."

Mr. Klassen said the public's desire to combat climate change could prompt companies to change their services, develop new products and even revamp their entire business models.

Government intervention on the environmental front -- for example, by setting limits on the public consumption of fuel and electricity -- is likely not the solution, said Bryan Karney, an expert on the social impact of technology at the University of Toronto.

"Control that is not willingly adopted and brought about by entrepreneurial spirit and creativity inevitably creates rebellion and backlash," said Mr. Karney, a civil engineering professor.

Ironically, doomsday prophecies about the climate may be hindering progress to effect real change in corporate and public behaviour, he said, noting alarmist reports and studies can create a "why bother?" attitude.

"Nobody knows what is going to happen 30 years from now," Mr. Karney said. "We have constantly under-predicted the ability for the environment to recover, but we do have to give it a break.

"The problem with being a pessimist is that you begin to hope for the things you fear so you're proven right."

Mr. Karney said tangible factors such as higher gas and energy prices may have a positive effect on both corporate and individual environmental stewardship, and create an "entrepreneurial spirit" among scientists and businesses.

"There is a huge role for the market (to play in finding solutions)," he said.

There are signs that the mounting clamour over climate change is already changing the corporate world. Yesterday, a group of the world's top multinational corporations -- including Nike, Sony, IMB, Polaroid and Lafarge -- promised to collectively reduce their annual output of carbon dioxide by 10 million tons. The move was timed to coincide with the United Nation's report on climate change.

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